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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001501

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL; NSC FOR
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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT KUMARATUNGA SAYS SHE WILL MEET RANIL ON
COHABITATION

REF: COLOMBO 1491

Classified By: Ambassador E. Ashley Wills. Reasons 1.5 B, D.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: My dinner with President Kumaratunga last night (August 14) went well. She was vivacious, relaxed and chatty. We hardly discussed substance at all, but she did say she will try to meet with Ranil before she leaves for the UK this weekend. She is prepared to discuss new terms for cohabitation but would not reveal what she has in mind. She apologized for her brother's intemperate remarks re President Bush (he did too). My dog liked her. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) President Kumaratunga came to dinner last night (August 14) at Jefferson House. She arrived 90 minutes late with her son - Wednesday's regular Cabinet meeting ran late - and stayed until 0100. Her sister, Sunetra, and her brother, Anura, arrived before her and were pleasant companions. Anura apologized for his remarks regarding President Bush's election. (Later in the evening, CBK pulled me aside and apologized as well for what he said.)

[1](#)3. (C) Our conversation was overwhelmingly light-hearted. The President turned gossipy at various points, entertaining us all with her earthy characterizations of various leading figures in Sri Lankan public life. It turns out she likes bourbon, a sure sign of refinement. She revealed a relaxed, radiant personality that disarmed the Wills clan, including my Golden Retriever, who disloyally sat beside the President the whole evening.

[1](#)4. (C) At a couple of points, we ventured into substance. She confirmed that former Foreign Minister Kadirgamar is trying to broker a meeting between her and the PM on cohabitation, and she said she would try to meet with Ranil before she leaves for the UK this weekend. (She is away for a week to spend time with her daughter and thus will not be in country during the Depsec's visit.) I told her the obvious, namely that her and Ranil's bickering serves the LTTE's interests, not Sri Lanka's. She agreed. She acknowledged that some of her phrasing in her TV speech last week was intemperate, but she blamed the UNP's constant harassment of her for her lack of restraint. All things summed, she came across as reasonable and in full control of her emotions and sense, an assessment I conveyed to the PM this morning, per his request (see reftel).

[1](#)5. (C) COMMENT: Chandrika can be beguiling and was on this occasion. I can see why she is so admired, especially but not only by middle and lower income Sri Lankans who respond well to her populist plain-speaking. It was interesting to see her having to put up with the good-natured ribbing of her brother, sister and son. Her humanity showed. END COMMENT.

Wills